

**Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon's Room
at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, 6 February, 1919, at
3 p. m.**

PRESENT

**AMERICA,
UNITED STATES OF**

President Wilson
Mr. R. Lansing
Mr. L. Garrison
Colonel U. S. Grant

BRITISH EMPIRE

The Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd
George, M. P.
The Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, M. P.
Gen. The Rt. Hon. Louis Botha
Captain E. Abraham
Mr. H. Norman

FRANCE

M. Clemenceau
M. Pichon
M. Dutasta
M. Berthelot
M. de Bearn
Capt. Portier

ITALY

M. Orlando
Baron Sonnino
Count Aldrovandi
Major Jones

JAPAN

Baron Makino
H. E. M. Matsui
M. Saburi

PRESENT DURING DISCUSSION OF ARAB QUESTION

**AMERICA,
UNITED STATES OF**

Major Bonsal
Mr. Westermann

BRITISH EMPIRE

Mr. Montagu
Sir A. Hirtzel
Sir Mark Sykes
Mr. Toynbee

FRANCE

M. Gout
M. de Caix
M. Coulondre
Ben Ghabrit

HEJDJAZ

Emir Feisal
Colonel Lawrence
Rustum Haider
Amir Abdul Hadi
Nuri Said

ITALY

M. de Martino
M. Galli
M. Piacentini

Interpreter: Professor P. J. Mantoux.

1. M. CLEMENCEAU, in opening the meeting, said that before beginning the business of the day he wished to make mention of a matter previously decided. He referred to the destruction of German submarines. He had understood that the decision had been that only submarines under construction should be destroyed. On referring to the Minutes, however, he saw that destruction of those handed over complete was also

Destruction of
Submarines

included. This decision was not that which he thought had been reached. He would, therefore, advise that before this decision was carried out, the advice of the Naval Commission concerning the fate of all the captured ships in Allied hands, should be awaited.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE thought that it would be better to destroy as many of these pests as possible.

M. CLEMENCEAU said that some had been assigned to France and some to Italy. He thought it was wrong that some should be destroyed while others were given away.

BARON MAKINO said that seven had been given to Japan.

MR. BALFOUR said that he understood M. Clemenceau to desire a uniform policy.

M. CLEMENCEAU said that that was exactly his meaning.

(It was agreed that further information as to what steps had been taken, should be obtained, and that the question should be decided later.)

2. (At this stage the Delegates for the Hedjaz and their technical advisers entered the room.)

Statement for
the Hedjaz
(a) General

EMIR FEISAL said that

In his memorandum of January 29th to the Peace Conference,¹ he had asked for the independence of all the Arabic speaking peoples in Asia, from the line Alexandretta-Diarbekir southward.

He based his request on the following points:—

(i) This area was once the home of important civilisations, and its people still have the capacity to play their part in the world.

(ii) All its inhabitants speak one language—Arabic.

(iii) The area has natural frontiers which ensure its unity and its future.

(iv) Its inhabitants are of one stock—the Semitic. Foreigners do not number 1% among them.

(v) Socially and economically it forms a unit. With each improvement of the means of communication its unity becomes more evident. There are few nations in the world as homogeneous as this.

(vi) The Arabic speaking peoples fought on the side of the Allies in their time of greatest stress, and fulfilled their promises.

(vii) At the end of the war the Allies promised them independence. The Allies had now won the war, and the Arabic speaking peoples thought themselves entitled to independence and worthy of it. It was in accord with the principles laid down by President Wilson and accepted by all the Allies.

(viii) The Arab army fought to win its freedom. It lost heavily: some 20,000 men were killed. Allenby acknowledged its services in his despatches. The army was representative of Arab ideals and was composed of young Syrians, Lebanese, Hejazis, Mesopotamians, Palestinians, and Yemenis.

¹ Miller, *My Diary*, vol. iv, p. 300.

(ix) The blood of Arab soldiers, the massacres among the civil populations, the economic ruin of the country in the war, deserved recognition.

(x) In Damascus, Beyrouth, Tripoli, Aleppo, Latakia, and the other districts of Syria, the civil population declared their independence and hoisted the Arab flag before the Allied troops arrived. The Allied Commander in Chief afterwards insisted that the flag be lowered to install temporary Military Governors. This he explained to the Arabs was provisional, till the Peace Conference settled the future of the country. Had the Arabs known it was in compliance with a secret treaty they would not have permitted it.

(xi) The Syrians who joined the Northern Army were recognised by the Allies as Belligerents. They demand through this delegation their independence.

His Father did not risk his life and his Kingdom by joining in the war at its most critical time to further any personal ambitions. He was not looking for an Empire. He rose up to free all the Arabic provinces from their Turkish Masters. He did not wish to extend the boundaries of the Hedjaz Kingdom a single inch.

His ideal was the ideal of all Arabic patriots. He could not believe that the Allies would run counter to their wishes. If they did so the consequences would be grave. The Arabs were most grateful to England and France for the help given them to free their country. The Arabs now asked them to fulfil their promises of November 1918. It was a momentous decision the Conference had to take, since on it depended the life of a nation inhabiting a country of great strategic importance between Europe and Asia.

The greatest difficulty would be over Syria. Syria claimed her unity and her independence, and the rest of the Arabic liberated areas wished Syria to take her natural place in the future confederation of liberated Arabic speaking Asia, the object of all Arab hopes and fears.

Some of the people of the present province of Lebanon were asking for French guarantees. Some of them did not wish to sever their connection with Syria. He was willing to admit (e) Lebanon their independence, but thought it essential to maintain some form of economic union in the interest of mutual development. He hoped nothing would be done now to render the admission of the Lebanon to the future confederation impossible, if it desired admission.

For the moment also the inhabitants of the rest of Syria hoped that the Lebanon people would of their own accord decide for federal union with themselves in Syria.

The Arabs realised how much their country lacked development. They wanted it to be the link between the East and West, to hand on Western civilisation to Asia. They did not wish (d) Economic Interests to close their doors to civilised people; on the contrary, as rulers of their own country, in their zeal for their country's betterment, they wanted to seek help from everyone who wished them well; but they could not sacrifice for this help any of the independence for which they had fought, since they regard it as a necessary basis of future prosperity. They must also guard their economic interests, as part of their duty as Governors. He hoped no Power imagined that it had the right to limit the independence of a people because it had material interests in their country.

Arab religious differences were being exploited. These had been triumphed over in the Hedjaz army, in which all creeds co-operated (e) Religious Differences to free their country. The first efforts of the Arab Government would be to maintain this welding of the faiths, in their common service of the principle of nationality.

Palestine, for its universal character, he left on one side for the mutual consideration of all parties interested. With this exception (f) Palestine he asked for the independence of the Arabic areas enumerated in his memorandum.

When this principle was admitted, he asked that the various Provinces, on the principle of self-determination, should be allowed to (g) International Enquiry as to Desires of the People indicate to the League of Nations the nature of the assistance they required. If the indications before the Conference in any one case were not conclusive as to their wishes for their complete independence or for their mandatory power, he suggested that an international inquiry, made in the area concerned, might be a quick, easy, sure and just way of determining their wishes.

3. MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked how many troops the Hedjaz had put into the field.

EMIR FEISAL replied that it was impossible to give the exact figure; but, including the Hedjaz Army, the Arabs had put about 100,000 men into the field. There was, in addition, a considerable number of Irregulars who were not on his registers. He thought he could assert that every man of fighting age in possession of a rifle between Mecca and Aleppo had joined the Arab standards. How many that might have been it was difficult to say, as he had no figures of the population. There remained four Divisions of Regulars as the standing army: the Irregulars had dispersed to their own homes.

He wished to explain that the Arab Government had been organised, as it were, in the firing line. It had been born after the outbreak of war and was not yet regularly constituted. Hence the dif-

ficulty of producing exact figures. Medina had only surrendered a few days ago.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked whether the Arab troops had taken any part on the Mesopotamian front.

EMIR FEISAL replied that all their operations outside the Hedjaz had been in Syria. In Mesopotamia there had been no need for an independent Arab movement and no scope for one in that region. Five of his Commanding Officers, however, and many of his men came from Mesopotamia. They had fought in his army to vindicate their rights to self-government.

4. PRESIDENT WILSON asked the Emir whether, seeing that the plan of mandatories on behalf of the League of Nations had been adopted, he would prefer for his people a single mandatory, or several.

Question of Mandatory
EMIR FEISAL said that he would not like to assume towards his people the responsibility of giving an answer to this question. It must be for the Arab people to declare their wishes in respect to a mandatory authority. Neither he, nor his father, nor, he thought, any person now living, would be ready to assume the responsibility of deciding this question on behalf of the people. He was here to ask for the independence of his people and for their right to choose their own mandatory.

PRESIDENT WILSON said that he understood this perfectly, but would like to know the Emir's personal opinion.

EMIR FEISAL said that personally he was afraid of partition. His principle was Arab unity. It was for this that the Arabs had fought. Any other solution would be regarded by the Arabs in the light of a division of spoils after a battle. The Arabs had fought a hard fight to achieve unity. He hoped the Conference would regard them as an oppressed nation which had risen against its masters. The Arabs asked for freedom only and would take nothing less. He thought the Conference would be of the opinion that the Arab revolt had been as well conducted as any rebellion of an oppressed people in recent memory. The Arabs were an ancient people, civilised and organised at a time when the nations represented in this room were unformed. They had suffered centuries of slavery and had now seized the chance of emancipation. He hoped that the Conference would not thrust them back into the condition from which they had now emerged. The Arabs had tasted slavery: none of the nations gathered in the room knew what that meant. For 400 years the Arabs had suffered under a violent military oppression, and as long as life remained in them, they meant never to return to it.

5. MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that he would like the Emir to give a

short account of the services rendered by the Arab forces in the defeat of the Turkish Armies.

Arab Military Operations

EMIR FEISAL said, when his father rebelled against the Turks, he was hereditary Governor of Mecca—a position held by the family for 800 years. He had no arms, machine-guns, guns, ammunition or supplies, and only took Mecca with difficulty. He was unable to take Medina. The Turks then sent 35,000 men to retake Mecca. God helped the Arabs, and the English also sent them material assistance. Officers and volunteers from the old Turkish army joined them and formed the nucleus of a regular force. In 14 months the Arab forces advanced 800 miles to the North and cut the Hedjaz railway South of Maan. This was an important military achievement as the Turkish army at Medina threatened the rear of the Arab forces. He had then attacked Maan by a frontal attack without any hope of success, in order to cover General Allenby's preparations and to prevent a Turkish concentration. He had placed his army voluntarily under General Allenby's command and did this to co-operate with him. General Allenby then asked the Arab forces to attack the three railways at Derat. The Arab army did its duty and cut these lines two days before General Allenby's attack which eventually led him to Damascus. The Arab army entered Damascus together with General Allenby's forces. From that point the Arab revolt spread like a flame and in one bound reached Latakia, which was entered by the Arabs the day before the French entered Beyrouth. His forces were the first to enter Aleppo. Throughout these operations the Arab plan had been subordinated to General Allenby's. They had abandoned all ambition to shine by themselves, or to do anything spectacular. They took 40,000 prisoners, who were delivered to the Allies. He need add nothing to the praise bestowed on the Arab troops in General Allenby's despatches.

M. PICHON asked whether the French had taken any part in the Arab operations on this front, and asked Emir Feisal to describe it.

EMIR FEISAL said that with him there had been a French contingent with four 65 mm. guns and two 85 mm. guns. This contingent had done wonderful work, and the help rendered by the French detachment placed upon the Arabs a debt of perpetual gratitude. There had also been with him a British detachment to whom he was equally grateful. He did not wish to praise them as their actions were beyond praise, as were those of his own troops which he had also abstained from praising.

Besides the military effort made by the Arabs, he wished to draw attention to the civil losses incurred. The Allied Officers who had witnessed the destroyed villages of Tafaz and Ahwali, could testify to the extent of the massacres perpetrated on the Arab population.

6. MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked whether the Emir could say whether there was any Arab population in Turkey outside Arabia and Syria: for instance in Anatolia.

**Arab Populations
Outside Arabia
and Syria** EMIR FEISAL replied that there were a few in the Adana district; a few in the Tarsus and Mersina area; but none in Anatolia. In all these regions they were a small minority and the Arabs were not claiming minority rights anywhere. Part of the population in the Diarbekir area spoke Arabic. There were also Arabs living across the Persian border. But no other considerable portions of the Arab population lived in isolated enclaves at a distance from the bulk of the race.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked whether there was any affinity between the Arabs and the Kurds.

EMIR FEISAL said that he would be delighted to claim all the Kurds as Arabs; but he felt he would ruin his case if he made even one questionable statement.

Finally he begged that he should not be penalised because he only spoke Arabic, an ancient and honourable tongue and the language of an ancient and honourable people.

(The Emir Feisal then retired and the meeting adjourned.)

VILLA MAJESTIC, PARIS, 7 February, 1919.